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Your Career in Global Development

► **Practical tips for getting started or charting a new course.**

By **Yvonne Hubbard**, Director of International Recruitment, and **Scott Webb**, former Program Officer for Sustainable Food & Agriculture Systems, International Relief & Development

THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT field has grown significantly over the past decade, and the diversity of projects has grown even more than their scope and scale. “Development” is more broadly defined than ever: encompassing governance, stabilization, and law and regulation in addition to traditional development areas such as education, health and food production. Measurement and accountability have combined with this broadening outlook to spur intense innovation and creativity. In short, it is an exciting time to be in development. There are more opportunities than ever to obtain challenging employment, and, as important, make a lasting difference in peoples’ lives. So what can those interested in development work do to find employment in the sector?

Your first priority is the same as when you are seeking to succeed in any field: develop yourself. Start by learning a language. French and Portuguese are in particular demand these days. Fluency in more than one language not only signals a dedication to mastering critical skills, it

also communicates at least the potential for deeper understanding of one’s surroundings. People don’t just learn how to speak a language, we learn how to enter the assumptions and thought processes of those who speak the language. This ability is enormously important to success in the development sector, where working with local communities requires nuanced understanding and awareness of cultural norms.

Next, obtain a master’s degree or more in a relevant field. With the growth of the sector, increasing numbers of colleges and universities offer degrees that would serve one well in development. For example, if program management is what you would like to do, you will need skills in budgeting, financial management and program development. Courses like PMD-Pro or becoming a certified project management professional (PMP) are especially useful. If you are interested in writing proposals and managing projects in the field, you should acquire general expertise in agriculture, engineering, public health or another specialty. You will also need skills like pro-

gram evaluation, monitoring and evaluation, assessments, proposal writing, logical frameworks and strategic partnering.

In addition to the knowledge to be gained, graduate study enables you to cultivate relationships with practitioners; future colleagues; and organizations like think tanks, research groups and professional associations. Employers like to see potential employees with these types of relationships already established.

Staying abreast of the latest news and trends in your area of interest will augment your academic study and work experience. Of course, the Internet makes that easier than ever, but there are also seminars and similar gatherings usually open to anyone interested in attending. One of our favorite resources right now is the Devex daily briefing. Over the past few years, Devex has invested significant resources in aggregating news relevant to the international development community. They have also assembled knowledgeable journalists, policymakers, practitioners and others to create analysis and policy documents.

InterAction, through policy briefings and *Monthly Developments*, presents the views and approaches of the American international development NGO community it represents. USAID has also been commissioning interesting studies and holds seminars on things like mobile technology and agricultural innovations. We also regularly consult ReliefWeb and AlertNet for humanitarian resources such as site reports and crisis updates, mostly from the UN. Finally, we follow numerous international development organizations, professionals, journalists and a variety of news sources on Twitter. We have also found useful articles through our smartphone apps like Zite and Flipboard that draw from those we follow on Twitter.

Find a way, if possible, to spend time in the field. Many colleges provide opportunities to do hands-on work as part of a degree program. There are also numerous volunteer programs that take one to other countries to work in and with communities. Of course, the crown jewel of such

organizations is the Peace Corps. Not only does it provide concrete skills attractive to prospective employers, many Peace Corps volunteers work on projects organized by international development groups. Peace Corps service is a strong indicator that a job candidate understands how actual development work is implemented in the field.

No matter what you do to prepare yourself to work or advance in the development sector, there comes a time to actually look for a job. As in any field, the place to start is with your contacts. Beyond those, the best way to cast a wider net is through LinkedIn and Devex. Devex is still where most American NGOs post their open positions, but other organizations, including InterAction, are catching up.


LinkedIn is today's CV. Anyone at all interested in obtaining a first job—or positioning oneself for something new—needs to have an updated, well-written LinkedIn profile. Many sites like Devex allow users to

import their LinkedIn profiles to populate their database. We recommend connecting on LinkedIn with as many recruiters in your industry as possible. Be an active LinkedIn user. At a minimum, write a profile overview, tweak your profile from time to time, join discussions, and post status updates like links to articles you are reading that are relevant to your work. (Even better are articles you have published.) Further, consider linking your Twitter account to post to LinkedIn. Recruiters are on LinkedIn all day. You want them to see your name, your interests and your accomplishments in activities related to development.

In addition to Devex and LinkedIn, InternationalJobs.org is a good general resource for program manager positions. AlertNet, ReliefWeb and DevNetJobs are useful for humanitarian and UN-oriented positions.

Once you land an interview, there are key things you can communicate to increase

your likelihood of receiving an offer. First, realize the number of key positions for expats will continue to decrease. Major donors increasingly desire local hires. If you are in the field already and can be hired as local staff at a locally competitive salary, that puts you in a stronger position. Second, communicate your geographic flexibility, especially early in your career. Finally, communicate flexibility on compensation. A phrase like "I am open to all opportunities" achieves that. In addition, it communicates a potential dedication to the organization and its goals, rather than simply a commitment to one's own specific career goals.

We believe there will be continued growth in the international development sector. Relevant skills, experience, and an attitude that communicates flexibility and passion will help open the door to an interesting and rewarding career improving lives and helping build livelihoods. 



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